



Unemployment-insurance stimulus package

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**Will pump
\$200 million
into
Washington's
economy**

**Temporarily
increases
unemployment
benefits by
\$45 a week**

**Improves access
to retraining
for unemployed
workers**

Governor Gregoire's stimulus package for 2009 includes three changes involving the unemployment-insurance system. Together, they will pump about \$200 million into Washington's economy. This money will ripple through entire communities as families use it to pay their bills and employers use it to cover payroll costs.

The funding comes from the state's Unemployment-Insurance Trust Fund, which is one of the healthiest in the nation, at nearly \$4 billion. The state can afford to draw down the fund by a small amount for unemployment-insurance programs, thereby aiding the economy without harming the account's ability to pay unemployment benefits during the recession.

1. **Temporarily increases the minimum weekly unemployment benefit** to \$155, and increases all benefits by another \$45 a week for most people receiving unemployment-insurance benefits. This will provide almost \$200 million in additional income for laid-off workers who are struggling to pay their bills, and it will benefit their local economies. The benefits will not be charged against taxable employers' accounts and, therefore, will not trigger rate increases.

Beginning May 3, 2009, through Jan. 2, 2010, all existing and new claims for "regular" unemployment benefits will receive the additional \$45 per week throughout the duration of their claim, including any training, extended or emergency benefits that they receive. In some cases, a person's extended and/or emergency benefits may be limited by a cap on the total unemployment benefits that individual is entitled to receive.

When combined with the benefit increase provided by the federal stimulus package, under current law, most people receiving unemployment benefits in Washington will be eligible to receive at least \$225 a week. The maximum will be \$611 a week for the specified time period.

Note: People who first apply for unemployment benefits near the end of 2009 will receive the higher benefit level throughout the duration of their claims.

Conceivably, people who use all of their regular benefits, emergency unemployment compensation and extended benefits could receive the higher pay throughout 2010, and even into 2011.

2. **Expands access to the Training Benefits Program**, which provides up to 52 weeks of unemployment benefits while a dislocated worker is in a training program for a high-demand occupation.
 - a. Beginning April 5, 2009, the deadlines for submitting a training plan and enrolling in training will be extended by 30 days (to 90 and 120 days, respectively), and the Employment Security Commissioner may waive the deadlines in special circumstances. The goal is to reduce the number of dislocated workers being denied access to the program because of missed deadlines.

**Improves
efforts to help
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- b. Beginning Sept. 7, 2009, eligibility will be expanded (beyond dislocated workers) to also include unemployed workers who are: disabled, low-income (earned less than 130 percent of the state minimum wage in their base year), honorably discharged from the military or Washington National Guard within the past 12 months, or currently in the Washington National Guard and need training to find suitable civilian employment in their community.
 - c. Defines “high-demand occupations” as jobs with substantial current or projected openings.
- 3. **Expands access to the Shared-Work Program**, which allows employers to temporarily reduce workers’ hours and allows the workers to receive partial unemployment benefits. Beginning April 5, 2009:
 - a. Workers can receive shared-work benefits for their entire benefit year, rather than just 26 weeks.
 - b. Employers may enroll any number of their workers in the program.
 - c. A shared-work plan may take effect no more than two weeks after it is approved, unless the employer requests a later start date. The goal is to speed up implementation.

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